

December 6, 2016

Subject: Urban Growth and Conservation

Reporting Period: October – December, 2016

Staff Lead: Emily Tibbott, Senior Program Advisor, Environmental Science and Policy

Recommended Action:

For information only – no action required.

Background:

Along the High Speed Rail corridor, 24 station areas are envisioned, some in major population centers and others in more rural contexts, particularly the Central Valley. These stations will have significant impacts on their surrounding communities as well as implications for how these communities grow. Each station area has or will receive a grant from the High Speed Rail Authority to assist with elements such as station siting, design, retail development, housing, and other land use considerations, with a principal focus on the area within a half-mile radius of the station. Stations are expected to bring economic opportunity and vitality, facilitate multi-modal transportation options, and encourage transit-oriented and compact development. While planning effectively for downtown development is critical to high speed rail success, an explicit focus on protection of the open space and agricultural lands values that in many cases provide the backdrop for these communities is equally important.

The Urban Growth and Conservation (UGC) Program, a new venture of the Strategic Growth Council, aims to help high speed rail station area geographies plan sustainably for the growth anticipated with the advent of the train. The Program goal is to assist station area communities in rural settings to protect urban open space values, as well as implement mechanisms for more efficient growth such that adjacent farm and ranch lands are protected; we are exploring an initial focus on the station area cities of Gilroy and Palmdale. In Gilroy, staff intend to work in tandem with the Office of Planning and Research, which has recently launched the Best Practices Pilot Program (BP3), aiming to bring resources and technical guidance to jurisdictions interested to pilot best practices for strengthening community resiliency to climate change.

Update:

During the last two months, SGC has met with consultants working with the High Speed Rail station area cities of Gilroy and Palmdale to gain a broader perspective of station area planning issue and progress. In Palmdale, staff has initiated conversations with the Southern California Association of Governments and LA Metro, other agencies funding transportation projects there, to explore greater synergies in effort. Additionally, following the November election, in which Gilroy voters supported passage of an urban growth boundary, staff are assessing support for the downtown high speed rail station location in that city.

In a related effort, SGC and OPR are collaborating on the development of a statewide resource document focused on urban growth management tools. This piece could support station area cities as they think about how they want to manage anticipated population growth. We are

considering the potential of Local Area Formation Commissions being a partner and/or audience for the document, and have met with the Santa Clara LAFCO to gain their perspective. A future meeting with the California LAFCO is also planned, along with other outreach efforts.

Finally, the Bechtel Foundation has decided to commit additional funds to support advance mitigation following the passage of AB 2087, specifically for the near-term addition of pilot areas and a focused effort on infrastructure agency involvement in new and existing pilots. SGC staff is exploring the appropriate level of involvement in these efforts.

Key Outcomes and Timing¹

- Climate-smart and growth management practices supported in Gilroy's and Palmdale's high speed rail station area plans and general plan updates
 - Gilroy station area plan and general plan update underway; best practices for both adopted by June 2017
 - Palmdale station area plan underway and general plan update process begins mid-2017; best practices adopted for both by Dec 2017
- Public funds awarded to one or both cities in support of efficient growth
 - AHSC and/or SALC funding awarded in at least one city (July 2017)
 - Additional GGRF program(s) funding leverage AHSC and/or SALC funding in at least one city (Dec 2017))
- Additional State-funded capacity placed in at least one city, liaising with SGC and OPR staff (March 2017)
- Biological and/or agricultural values data made available to each city and adopted to guide future infrastructure mitigation investments (June 2017)

¹ Outcomes and timing are preliminary and subject to change following upcoming conversations with each city.